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FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6863
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 6027
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 6325
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1572
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 4349
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5620
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1808
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 3743
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1813
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2900
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 001552

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SUBJECT: NEPAL'S CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER APPRECIATES
U.S. ASSISTANCE

Classified By: Ambassador Nancy J. Powell. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

1. (C) On August 10, with just over 100 days to go before the Constituent Assembly (CA) election, Chief Election Commissioner Bhojraj Pokharel reviewed for the Ambassador the Commission's current work on voter education, the code of conduct, as well as its efforts to encourage political parties to campaign. The procedures and schedule for releasing election results were still being finalized, but the constituency seats would be announced first and then the results from the proportional voting. Pokharel was very appreciative when the Ambassador informed him that the U.S. would be donating USD 3 million to print the ballots for the CA election. Media coverage of the announcement was widespread and positive.

Parties Need to Be More Active

2. (C) On August 10 Chief Election Commissioner Bhojraj Pokharel reviewed for the Ambassador some of the Commission's work to date to prepare for the November 22 Constituent Assembly Election as well as its current focus. The training of the trainers for an extensive voter education program had started, and would be continuing into November. He said the Commission had discussed a draft Code of Conduct for the press with media representatives earlier that day. The Commission would be actively encouraging the political parties to get ready for the election, engage the public in the districts, and to play by the rules. (Note: According to press reports from August 13, the Election Commissioners met Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala on August 12 and urged him to immediately make public a collective, sincere commitment from the eight-party alliance to convince the public that the CA election would be held as scheduled. End note.) The Chief Commissioner expressed concern about poor security, limited capacity of the government, and low morale of some of the security forces.

First Constituency Results, then Proportional

13. (C) Given the remoteness of many polling locations, the Chief Commissioner noted it would not be possible to immediately announce election results. He said he was aiming to have most results announced within seven days, but some especially remote districts would be unable to meet that target. For security reasons ballot would be counted at the district headquarters, with observers, and once counting started participants would have to continue until all votes were counted. The constituency seats elected using the first-past-the-post system would be announced immediately, but the parties' results for the proportionally allocated seats would have to be accumulated nationwide. Once it was determined how many seats each party had been allocated through proportional representation, that would be announced, but party leaders would still need to select the corresponding number of candidates from the party list.

Appreciation for U.S. Money to Print Ballots

14. (U) The Ambassador informed Commissioner Pokharel that immediately following their meeting the U.S. would be announcing a USD 3 million donation to print the ballots for the CA election. The Ambassador added that IFES would be in contact with the Commission to work out the details. Commissioner Pokharel was very appreciative of this contribution. He referred to the US as a key partner and expressed his appreciation for its unwavering support for the Commission. The Ambassador reinforced this point by expressing interest in maintaining the Commission's capacity after the CA election.

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Positive Press Coverage

15. (U) The U.S. Mission to Nepal's news release announcing the United States' donation of USD 3 million to support the Constituent Assembly received prominent and straight-forward coverage in all major Nepali television, radio, and print media. Popular, privately-owned Kantipur Television and Nepal 1 Television featured the announcement as a headline story, noting that the donation was discussed during the Ambassador's meeting with the Prime Minister on August 10. Government-owned "The Rising Nepal" newspaper (circulation 20,000) ran the announcement as the lead, front-page story on Saturday, publishing the story along with a photo of the Ambassador and Prime Minister. "The Rising Nepal's" sister publication, "Gorkhapatra" (circulation 50,000), also published the story on the front page. The largest circulating Nepali language daily, "Kantipur" (circulation 150,000), "The Himalayan Times" (circulation 40,000), "Nepal Samacharpatra" (circulation 70,000) and "Rajdhani" (circulation 30,000), all published the story on Saturday. "The Kathmandu Post" also led with the story on the Saturday edition's front page. Almost all FM radio stations on Saturday broadcast the announcement as headline news.

Comment

16. (C) With the USD 3 million donation, in addition to the USD 3.8 million funding USAID has previously committed the United States has made a strong, public commitment to Nepal's upcoming CA election. Chief Election Commissioner Pokharel continues to exercise a useful role in moving all the key actors toward a free, fair, and impartial CA election. He is right to argue the parties need to be more active as there is much more mainstream parties could be doing to reach out to voters.
POWELL